The meeting was called to order at 11 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/714)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/714, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: I would like to begin by saluting the life of Khaled Omar Harrah, a member of the White Helmets killed on 11 August by air strikes. Council members all remember him, I am sure. We remember him in the video that we saw as he brushed aside debris and reached through a hole in the wall to pull out a 10-day-old baby from the rubble of a collapsed building in 2014. How could we not? How could anyone forget those searing images of rescued children, carried by young men and women barely visible through clouds of smoke and mounds of rubble. How can we forget such haunting images as that of 5-year-old Omran Daqneesh, a silent face covered in blood and dust, after being pulled from the rubble caused by an air strike. In Omran's case, there is even a video — if one can bear to watch. Just pause for a moment and imagine that this was your child, a child that has known nothing but horrific war. And his brother is dead. Omran was the "lucky one" according to a local doctor. Lucky is the word that corresponds to such a context. That is the reality of what is at stake this morning here in the Chamber — not the politicking and posturing or the power games and defensiveness. All we need is for the guns to fall silent.

Aleppo is being bombed every single day. Just this morning, we received reports of dozens of new attacks. The entire city is affected by fighting causing hundreds of civilian casualties. Air strikes in the east and rocket and mortar attacks in the west are destroying civilian structure, forcing yet more people to flee for safety, while their houses are being destroyed and others are trapped by fighting and unable to move owing to fear and insecurity. As we sit here around this safe table, humanitarian rescue workers are risking their lives in search for those buried under the debris. The risk to rescue workers is always immense, but it is particularly so in much of Syria, with reports of these so-called "double-tap attacks", wherein a helicopter or a jet bombs a building, then waits some time — just enough for rescue and medical workers to arrive — before attacking again. It is estimated that more than 130 White Helmets volunteers have lost their lives since 2013 and that most killings were caused by those heinous double-tap attacks.

Most rescue workers know that the helicopters are still circling, but they also know that people are trapped, dying under the rubble. They still go in, risking their lives. Doctors facing shortages of supplies must decide which patients to treat, even as the hospitals in which they work are attacked while they are all crammed into the basement. Rescue workers must decide to which neighbourhoods to send ever-dwindling crews after an airs trike or mortar attack has destroyed yet another home, school or hospital.

Khaled and his colleagues have been saving thousands of lives. Their humanity provides hope in a place in which there is scarcely any left. They represent the very best of what it means to be a humanitarian. Just last Friday, we commemorated World Humanitarian Day, when we took time to pay tribute to Khaled and all the brave men and women who have died in humanitarian service in Syria and around the world. Let us together honour them here today as well, and all of those who continue to risk their lives every day for the benefit of others. The best way of honouring them is to make the politics round this table work by collectively agreeing to stop the guns, the shells, the airstrikes and the bombs. With the Council's collective will, that can be done now — and now, immediately. I

can assure members that the humanitarians are ready to go in.

I have briefed the Council numerous times already on Aleppo. Aleppo has become the apex of horror at its most horrific extent of the suffering of people. I did so during an emergency meeting in early May (see S/PV.7687). I briefed the Council in June (see S/PV.7725) , in July (see S/PV.7744) and as recently as last week. I have underscored that up to 275,000 people in eastern Aleppo have been almost entirely cut off from vital supplies, including food, water, medicine and electricity, for over a month now, and they are living in constant fear of total besiegement, while access also remains extremely difficult to the estimated 1.5 million people in western parts of the city. Depending on military developments, either or both parts of the city could become besieged.

Earlier this month I stressed that the United Nations had developed an emergency response operational plan and stood ready to send truckloads of lifesaving supplies across Aleppo if access and security were granted. I repeatedly called for a pause in fighting to allow us to secure a lifeline to those in need. I urged for a ceasefire, or at a minimum a 48-hour pause. The Secretary-General reiterated those calls, and so has his Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, as well as others, including President Peter Maurer of the International Committee of the Red Cross. This is not a negotiating tactic — this is what is needed to put confidence into the hundreds of truck drivers to jump back in their cabs. load their trucks and set off on the slow journey over shell-cratered roads, all the time wondering whether the sniper will take the shot, or whether an improvised explosive device will catapult him into the air.

I therefore welcome the announcement by the Russian Federation on 18 August to support the call for a 48-hour ceasefire. We are clear that anything shorter would not allow us to respond meaningfully to the size of the need we are facing, either in eastern or western Aleppo today. While that statement is positive, this cannot be a one-sided offer. I have consistently said that any pause also needed to include clear security assurances from all the parties to the conflict. As German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said the other day, "you cannot have a unilateral ceasefire"; it has to be a United Nations lead, as the humanitarian access has to be to all those in need, whoever and wherever they are. I and my Office are therefore working with all sides to seek to ensure that, should the announcement by the Russian Federation translate into a comprehensive pause, that will enable aid to safely make its way to those who so desperately need it and that we can move as quickly as possible.

We are continuing to provide support into western Aleppo. Over the weekend, we completed an assessment of an alternative route into western Aleppo that the trucks would follow, following the closure of the main thoroughfare into Aleppo from the south. The new route, which goes around the east of the city and enters into west Aleppo from the north, has been cleared for movement. Through that route, we have been able to provide assistance through our regular programming to those in western Aleppo, but have at the same time been prepositioning aid in western Aleppo for movement into eastern Aleppo. We have the stocks, have identified the route and are ready to move 50 trucks of assistance from western Aleppo into the east, as soon as we receive the necessary security assurances.

We are also preparing for cross-border movement of assistance into eastern Aleppo. The plan is largely business-as-usual for our cross-border operation — it uses the same mechanisms that are currently in place and utilizes the same routes that had been used prior to the 7 July, cutting of the Castello Road. We are preparing for an initial movement that would send 20 trucks with much-needed food into eastern Aleppo during the first pause. That would then be scaled up as appropriate for future pauses, and include additional humanitarian assistance based on assessed need. The plan would see the loading of items monitored by the United Nations Monitoring Mission, which would then seal the trucks so that any tampering would be evident on arrival. All trucks would include United Nations identifying markers. Once cleared, the trucks would travel across the border into Syria along the same routes as used prior to 7 July. They would travel along the Castello Road and into eastern Aleppo city directly to the warehouses of our partners. Once at the warehouses, trucks would be confirmed as not having been tampered with, and then the seals would be broken and assistance off-loaded.

As I have said, we are ready. Once we have the green light, we can start to move assistance within 48 to 72 hours. Plans are in place, but we need the agreement of all parties to let us do our job.

This is a race against time, as fighting rages on, with ever-more shocking reports of bombed hospitals

and wrecked schools. Electricity is out, water is scarce and movement is restricted. Civilian infrastructure continues to be relentlessly attacked, collectively punishing hundreds of thousands of civilians. These include attacks on countless hospitals and medical facilities, in Aleppo and elsewhere. The few staff that remain are overstretched and working in shifts. And the lack of health workers is compounded by the inability of many health workers to make the daily journey to work due to insecurity and moving front lines. In July alone, 44 attacks on medical and health facilities were reported throughout Syria, including attacks against five out of the nine hospitals in eastern Aleppo. We have received further reports of hospital attacks these past few weeks, including last Friday — on World Humanitarian Day. In besieged Daraya, for example, the last remaining civilian hospital was reportedly hit as a result of shelling and attacks on the area. In western Aleppo, a mobile clinic was attacked in the Al-Hamdaniya neighbourhood, a facility supported by UNICEF and providing health care to internally displaced persons from the 1070 apartment complex.

To help put things in perspective, Physicians for Human Rights has documented 373 attacks on 265 medical facilities since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014). Three hundred and thirty-six attacks were by Syrian Government and allied forces, 14 by non-State armed groups, 10 by the Islamic State in the Levant and Jabhat Al-Nusra, one by coalition forces and 12 by unknown forces. At least 72 attacks were with barrel bombs. According to Physicians for Human Rights, those attacks caused the deaths of 750 medical personnel. What is more, those numbers do not even include figures for June, July and August, which appear to have been among the deadliest since the start of the conflict, more than half a decade ago. In late July, for example, airstrikes repeatedly hit the Al-Hakim hospital. According to reports, a two-day-old baby died in his incubator due to oxygen interruptions following the attack. Three more babies reportedly died the next day due to respiratory problems caused by the fallout of the bombardment. This is obscene and unconscionable.

Let me now turn to cross-line inter-agency operations to besieged, hardto-reach and other priority locations. Progress has been made this year, with a net total of 1,275,750 people reached in besieged, hard-to-reach and priority locations. As I reported to the Council last month, we have reached each besieged location at least once, including 401,650 of the 590,200 people living in those locations, including through almost 100 airdrop rotations to Deir ez-Zor city since 10 April. Significant progress was made on approvals by the Government of Syria for the July inter-agency convoy plan, with 34 out of 35 locations approved for convoys, including all requested besieged areas. Moreover, following my latest open briefing to the Council, on 25 July, we managed to deploy, during the closing days of the month, a number of inter-agency convoys to Hajeb and Banan, as well as Talbiseh, Ar-Rastan and Al-Houla, reaching over 270.000 people in need.

That being said, as I informed the Council on 9 August, we unfortunately appear to be once again in reverse gear. In fact, on 19 July, the United Nations submitted its August inter-agency convoy plan to the Syrian authorities, which included 24 requests to 32 locations, including all besieged locations, aiming to reach 991,050 people, including 523,550 people in hard-to-reach areas and 467,500 people in besieged areas. In its response, which was due on 28 July but received on 3 August and amended twice thereafter, the Syrian authorities affirmed that the United Nations and its partners could deliver multisectoral assistance to 505,750 of the 991,050 requested people in 23 of 32 initially requested locations. The Syrian authorities also requested that 41 other locations be reached in August outside the plan.

All in all, the United Nations was denied access to more than 50 per cent of requested beneficiaries, which includes locations such as Darayya and the Kafr Batna sub-district in rural Damascus, as well as eastern Aleppo. The four towns — Madaya, Zabadani, Fo'ah and Kefraya — even though approved under the August plan, have not received United Nations assistance since 30 April because of tensions among parties to the agreement, fuelled by heavy aerial bombardment in Idlib and shelling on Fo'ah and Kefraya. Moreover, active conflict and insecurity elsewhere, as well as numerous delays in getting the necessary facilitation letters required to load and move convoys, have been limiting factors in reaching other locations these past many weeks.

As a result, no inter-agency convoys have moved in August — not a single one, and we are just one week away from September and have already submitted next month's inter-agency convoy plan. This plan, which was submitted to the Syrian authorities yesterday, aims to reach 1.19 million people in need across 34 besieged, hard-to-reach and priority cross-line areas. A

response from the Syrian authorities is expected around 30 August, as per the agreed review process.

The United Nations has made numerous appeals in recent weeks and months for the medical evacuation of people with urgent needs from all besieged locations, in particular the besieged towns of Fo'ah, Kefraya, Madaya, and Zabadani, where over 62,000 people are who continue to be besieged. I welcome the news received last Friday and over the weekend of the evacuation by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent of 39 people requiring urgent medical assistance, including children, from Fo'ah and Madaya. These evacuations follow the evacuation of a 10-year-old girl from Madaya on 13 August and the well-publicized evacuation from eastern Ghouta of conjoined twins on 12 August. These evacuations would not have been possible without the approval of the Syrian authorities.

While I would like to express my appreciation to all who have been involved in this operation, similar actions are needed in order to evacuate all Syrians in need of medical assistance. As I have said countless times before, medical evacuations are not a question of politics or military advantage, but of basic humanity. They must be immediately available wherever needed. This also includes the delivery of humanitarian and medical assistance to besieged locations, in particular into the four towns, which have remained without any United Nations assistance in over 110 days.

This is the greatest crisis of our time, and that is saying something in the light of what is happening in Yemen, South Sudan, the Lake Chad Basin, Iraq and Afghanistan, and that is without even mentioning those that are not man-made conflicts — natural disasters such as those in the Philippines, Nepal, Fiji and Ecuador. The Syrian people have faced an onslaught of unspeakable violence. The reports are endless: barrel bombs, hellfire cannons, cluster munitions, chemical weapons, thermite bombs, napalm, suicide bombs, mortars and rockets, snipers, bombs landing on schools, hospitals and civilian neighbourhoods, rape, illegal detention, torture, child recruitment, sieges of entire cities, starving people to death deliberately. And all of that has occurred when someone has the power — with a pen, with the simple stroke of a pen — to allow food to get to people. It is a chilling thought that these actions and these levels of suffering have been tolerated, with only limited international interference.

When hospital attacks have become the new normal, when medieval sieges of entire cities and neighbourhoods have become a lasting reality for hundreds of thousands of people, the Council cannot look the other way. It needs to act and ensure the full implementation of all its resolutions. For as long as there is impunity, this unprecedented scale of abuses and violations will simply not decline.

In Aleppo we risk seeing a humanitarian catastrophe unparalleled in the over five years of bloodshed and carnage in the Syrian conflict. Once again, I cannot stress strongly enough the need for a 48-hour pause in fighting to be approved by all sides and come into effect so that safe and sustained humanitarian access is opened to all areas of Aleppo. I urge all parties to the conflict to heed the call for a cessation of violence in all its forms, first and foremost for the sake of the Syrian people. I urge all Member States, all Member States with influence over the parties, all Council members, all International Syria Support Group (ISSG) members, and in particular the two ISSG co-chairs, the United States and the Russian Federation, to rapidly reach agreement on the security guarantees and operational modalities for a ceasefire to the fighting in Aleppo and elsewhere. Not only would such an agreement ease the suffering of the Syrian people, it could also facilitate the establishment of an environment more conducive to the resumption of the intra-Syrian talks.

Before I conclude today, I would like to make a final note. The United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, Yacoub El Hillo, drove out of Damascus today, ending a three-year appointment in one of the most difficult and dangerous positions that exist in the United Nations. His tireless work, his bravery and his exceptional diplomatic skills saved countless lives. He is not just an exemplary humanitarian, but he has been the bedrock of our humanitarian response in Syria, one that many others have been able to build on. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank him, on behalf the entire United Nations and the wider humanitarian ecosystem, for all he has done. We owe it to the Syrian people he has served and saved to capture the spirit and practice of his brave, professional legacy.

Finally, I am not going to pretend — as the humanitarian chief of the United Nations, I am very angry. The callous carnage that is Syria has long since moved from the cynical to the sinful. What is happening in Aleppo today, and throughout Syria over the past five years, is an outrage against every moral fibre in our

being as human beings, as fellow human beings, with every Syrian having been caught up in this unending cataclysm. And it is the failure of politics, of all of us, which Council members know as members of the Security Council. So, please, Mr. President, now is the moment — this instant — to put our differences aside and come together as one and stop this humanitarian shame upon us all, once and for all.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mrs. Schwalger (New Zealand): I thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his briefing. I would assure him that we remember Khaled Omar Harrah, and we remember and commend all of the humanitarian and search-and-rescue workers who have put themselves at risk as they strive to save and support innocent civilians, both in Syria and beyond. We would also ask that Mr. O'Brien pass our expression of appreciation to Yacoub El Hillo for his selfless and unwavering service in the work he has done in Syria.

Distressed at the horrific humanitarian situation in Syria and the looming humanitarian catastrophe in Aleppo, New Zealand, Egypt and Spain, as Syria humanitarian penholders, felt compelled to speak here in this open meeting today. We thought it important to call here publicly, in the open, on all the relevant parties to take measures to improve the humanitarian situation, including, first, by allowing immediate, unhindered and complete humanitarian access to all areas of Syria; secondly, by immediately lifting all sieges; thirdly, by implementing substantial pauses in fighting to ensure that sustained humanitarian deliveries to Aleppo can commence safely and effectively, whether it be via cross-line or cross-border efforts; and, finaliy, by ensuring that all initiatives operate according to international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles.

We acknowledge the Russian support for the 48-hour humanitarian pauses and look forward to them working with the United Nations and other stakeholders to ensure their full implementation, in accordance with international humanitarian law, as called for this morning by Under-Secretary-General O'Brien.

Terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is criminal and unjustifiable. Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front, which recently renamed itself to Jabhat Fateh Al-Sham, are designated by the Security Council as terrorist organizations. The international community must do all it can to prevent any material or financial support from reaching those groups and dissuade any party to the cessation of hostilities from fighting in collaboration with them.

We strongly condemn ongoing and repeated attacks against medical personnel and facilities. All parties must uphold the principle of medical neutrality. The humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate in the absence of a political solution.

We reaffirm support for the Syrian-led political process, facilitated by the United Nations, which includes formal negotiations on a political transition process.

We had hoped to agree on a draft press statement that encompassed the points that I have just outlined, and we are disappointed and frustrated that we have not been able to do so. It is disappointing that we are not able to agree on a response to the horrific humanitarian situation throughout Syria and the looming humanitarian catastrophe in Aleppo. We must do better as a Council. The innocent civilians of Syria deserve no less from us.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I would like to Stephen O'Brien and all the humanitarian workers who trying to do their jobs as best they can in Aleppo and the rest of Syria.

We gather in the Chamber every month, and we routinely reduce the situation in Syria to simple statistics — statistics such as 400,000 killed, over 2 million injured and millions more forced to flee. A number one does not hear often in Syria is zero, but that is the number I would like to focus on today. That is the exact number of aid convoys that have reached besieged and hard-to-reach areas this month.

We sat time and time again in the comfort of the Chamber and agreed on the need for humanitarian assistance to reach those in need, and yet zero crates of food have arrived in Aleppo and zero medical supplies have arrived to replenish the makeshift hospitals that care for civilians. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2016/714) makes clear, four of those hospitals, as well as the central blood blank, were hit by air strikes in east Aleppo city on 23 and 24 July. There is zero justification for those attacks. Either these facilities are being directly targeted or air strikes are being conducted with deliberate disregard for civilians on the ground. Both scenarios are wholly inexcusable.

And yet it gets worse. Human Rights Watch reported last week that the joint Syrian-Russian air campaign had violated international law by dropping incendiary munitions on civilian areas. A single occurrence of that would be unacceptable, and yet the report says that it has happened twice a week, on average, for over two months. Those weapons have no place in war, and urban spaces in Syria are clearly not an exception. I call on Russia to end the use of those weapons in the air campaign and to use its influence on the regime to end all attacks on civilians.

The list of heinous weapons being deployed in Syria, sadly, does not end there. Over half a year after the destruction of Syria's declared chemical weapon stockpile, reports now suggest that there is a resurgence of chlorine gas attacks in Idlib and in Aleppo. Is there a more sickening way to mark the third anniversary of the gas attack in Ghouta? Let us therefore all be clear: the use of those weapons is abhorrent and we unequivocally condemn those who unleash them. Later this week, we will have an opportunity to hear a fuller picture, when the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism reports. The Council must stand ready to demonstrate a robust response to that report, whatever the findings.

All the horrors that I have just described are the reality of life today in Syria and in Aleppo. Those committing those horrors have a responsibility to change the reality, and yet they show no willingness to do so. Let me spell out for them what they have to do. First stop the bombing — stop the indiscriminate attacks on medical facilities and civilians. Secondly, guarantee safe and sustained access to humanitarian agencies. Thirdly, resume political talks. It is really that simple.

The United Nations call for weekly, 48-hour pauses to get aid into Aleppo is a step forward. We fully support it, as it could ensure that those in dire need of medical evacuation can access medical treatment. And, with Russia's indication of support for that initiative, I hope we can all now agree to it. I also hope that we can all agree to the point just put forward by the representatives of New Zealand, Spain and Egypt. I certainly do.

I started this intervention with some statistics, but sometimes statistics cannot show the true human impact of conflict. Anyone who has been on social media or has watched the news this week will know the name and face of Omran Daqneesh, the stunned, bloodied, terrified little boy who sat in an ambulance, having narrowly escaped death. As Stephen reminded us, his brother and hundreds of thousands of his fellow Syrians were not so fortunate. Omran has become the human face of the Syrian conflict for millions around the world, but we must not forget that there are 13.5 million faces in Syria just like his — the faces of men, women and children in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. We can help deliver that. The United Kingdom stands ready to play our part, and I implore each and every one of us gathered here to do the same.

Mr. Lamek (France) (*spoke in French*): I would also like to begin by thanking Stephen O'Brien for the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2016/714) and for his briefing this morning.

The Security Council is meeting publicly in order to give the humanitarian situation in Syria the attention in deserves, as the picture is dreadful. In Aleppo, 250,000 people are facing what the Secretary-General calls an uprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. Civilians endure endless aerial bombardments. Moreover, chemical-weapons attacks were documented in Aleppo on 10 August, as they were in Saraqeb nine days prior. Such attacks constitute a violation of resolution 2118 (2013) and yet another instance of a war crime and attack against civilians.

Three years ago, almost to the day, Bashar Al-Assad's regime massacred over 1,000 civilians through the use of chemical weapons in Ghouta. I would like to take the occasion of this notorious anniversary to reaffirm France's determination to ensuring that this crime is not forgotten and does not go unpunished.

Aleppo joins the list of cities besieged by the regime and its allies, using the same methods. Last February, the cessation of hostilities sparked new hope. The regime seeks to quash that hope. It has never truly desisted from its efforts to plunge the city into a humanitarian chaos of unprecedented scope. In fact, it is clear today that its agreement to a cessation of hostilities was merely an attempt to mask an exclusively military strategy. Aleppo must not become the new Homs. It is the responsibility of the Security Council to check the military course currently at work.

Elsewhere in Syria, the situation is no longer sustainable. Given that air strikes have become incessant, Syrians are trying to survive under the bombs. Humanitarian access continues to be hampered

in Dar'a, Darayya and Madaya, endangering the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians. As Stephen O'Brien has reminded us, the United Nations humanitarian plan for the month of August is a serious failure. With regard to the month of July, the report is just as disappointing, as less than half of the population under siege was able to receive food aid, while medical supplies continued to be removed from convoys by the Syrian regime. Syrian civilians lack everything, and we know where responsibility lies.

What has happened? On 22 December 2015 the Security Council adopted resolution 2258 (2015), which demands that,

> "[a]ll parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, immediately comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international humanitarian rights law as applicable" (*resolution 2258 (2015), para. 1*).

Since then, after a brief pause, the brutality again escalated. On 4 May, after the resumption of hostilities by the regime and its allies, we organized with the United Kingdom delegation an open meeting on Aleppo (see S/PV.7687) to call for compliance with the Council's demands regarding the humanitarian situation and, in particular, for the cessation of attacks against civilians and adherence to the timetable agreed by the Council in resolution 2254 (2015).

But none of those commitments has materialized. As Mr. O'Brien has just said, we are moving in reverse. The relentless bombing has continued, humanitarian access to besieged cities has been continuously denied and the prospect of establishing a transitional authority by 1 August was scratched out in a pen stroke through the regime's operations supported by its allies. The tragedy in Aleppo was fully described during the Arria Formula meeting on 8 August. The poignant story of CNN journalist Clarissa Ward and the statements made by Aleppo doctors drew attention to the scandalous practice of targeting medical facilities. As Mr. O'brien has just mentioned, Khaled Harrah of the White Helmets died several days later. I, too, would like here to pay tribute to him, as well as to all humanitarian workers.

The negotiations in Geneva on the terms of a truce in Aleppo must be completed. International humanitarian law and the principles governing humanitarian efforts are not negotiable. The introduction of weekly humanitarian pauses is a strict minimum requirement, which, moreover, should have been implemented much earlier. But above all, what is required is respect for one of the most fundamental rights in situations of armed conflict, namely, unconditional, safe, full and unhindered humanitarian access — in Aleppo and throughout Syria — for all people in need of it.

Similarly, a lasting cessation of hostilities is pressing and crucial throughout the country. Depriving people of their rights and all protection seeds the ground for their radicalization. We must break that spiral, which has caused too much suffering. Only a cessation of hostilities will allow for credible political negotiations. We remind everyone that there is no military solution to the conflict and that only a political solution can bring back stability and lastingly staunch the source of radicalization. As called for in resolution 2254 (2015), France again calls for the implementation of

> "[a]n inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, with a view to full implementation of the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012"(*resolution 2254 (2015), fifth preambular paragraph*).

France again expresses its adamance in that regard, so that the supporters of the regime work towards implementing the commitments collectively undertaken in this forum.

Mrs. Carrión (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his briefing.

Last Friday, 19 August, saw the commemoration of World Humanitarian Day. My delegation therefore wishes to acknowledge the tireless effort and personal sacrifice of every one of the thousands of humanitarian workers throughout the world who daily put their lives at risk to help those most in need of their help. Today, 130 million people around the world are in need of such assistance, including several million in Syria alone. Those are terrible statistics that mask personal tragedies. Sometimes, however, there are exceptions. The case of the Syrian child Aylan Kurdi, who washed up on the coast off Turkey while trying to escape with his family the horror of the Syrian conflict shocked the world last year. Just a few days ago, pictures of little 5-year-old Omran Daqneesh seated in an ambulance in Aleppo while waiting for his wounds to be treated shook us once again. Those images leave us wondering if his expression denotes indifference to the horror to which

he has become accustomed or if, while he is still in a state of shock, his face reflects his wondering why since birth his life has been marked only by war and death.

That latest incident also makes us reflect on the important and courageous task that doctors and other health personnel carry out in order to save lives such that of this little boy — in times when exercising such a noble profession or being present in a hospital in Syria is now synonymous with becoming the target of attacks and aerial bombing, when the special protection afforded to them under international law should be an indication to the contrary. How can we explain that only days ago four babies died as a result of the latest attacks? What is the limit to so much injustice?

It is for those reasons that Uruguay most enthusiastically welcomed the recommendations of the Secretary-General with regard to the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) and strongly condemns the attacks perpetrated against medical facilities and personnel in Syria, irrespective of who is responsible.

The two cases I just mentioned represent only a mere microcosm of the catastrophe that the Syrian people have experienced for over five years. Its enormous impact and immediate symbolism should make us reflect on the responsibility, which weighs heavily on our shoulders, to find solutions to put an immediate end to the war, which undoubtedly is the worst humanitarian disaster of the twenty-first century.

In July, the Nooreldin al-Zenki armed opposition group decapitated a Palestinian boy in a barbaric act that we duly condemned. The following day, the same group issued a communiqué acknowledging that some of its members had been responsible for such an act of savagery act and that an internal disciplinary committee would investigate the facts. Is that the accountability and justice that we demand?

Uruguay believes that the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, proceeded correctly last Thursday, when he sent a clear message of discontent when he suspended the meeting of the humanitarian access working group on of the International Syria Support Group and urged all the parties to accept weekly 48-hour humanitarian pauses, as repeatedly called for by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Regrettably, the convoys are still awaiting authorization to enter. To quote Mr. De Mistura, in the month of August "not one single humanitarian convoy in one month has reached any of the besieged areas". What we see and hear of are only pitched battles, offensives, counter-offensives, rockets, barrel bombs, mortars, cannons, napalm, chlorine gas, snipers, aerial bombing attacks and suicide attacks. This is a clear failure on the part of the international community — and in particular of the Council, which has not been able provide the necessary support to humanitarian agencies to implement the proposed humanitarian pauses despite the fact that the majority of us who are here today have supported that initiative.

We reiterate our firm support for the requested truce and renew our call on those directly involved in the conflict or have an influence on the parties to act responsibly in order to allow immediate access to humanitarian aid, which is of such vital importance to the survival of thousands of people trapped by fighting in Aleppo and other areas. That also requires new understanding to relaunch and strengthen the cessation of hostilities throughout Syria to significantly reduce the levels of violence and create a climate more conducive to the delivery of humanitarian aid and the resumption of the political process.

Lastly, Uruguay would like to reiterate once again the urgency of resuming talks between the parties that could lead to a political transition. We are convinced that that is the only way to achieve a lasting solution to the conflict in accordance with the provisions of resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016). In that regard, we once again express our full support for the Special Envoy in his efforts to convene the parties as soon as possible for a new round of talks.

Time is running out. We cannot allow the Syrian people, overwhelmed by so many years of suffering, to believe that the United Nations and the Security Council have completely abandoned them.

Mr. González de Linares Palou (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I want to thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien for his briefing to the Security Council, as well as to align myself with the statement made by the representative of New Zealand on behalf of the three penholders on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

We fully agree that we should ensure with the utmost urgency that the civilian population, both in Aleppo and in the rest of the country, receives the protection and assistance they need from impartial actors and in full respect for humanitarian principles and under the leadership of the United Nations. Of course, there

should be an immediate cessation of all attacks on medical personnel and on civilian infrastructure — such as schools, camps for internally displaced persons and hospitals. In addition, there should be immediate and unrestricted access to medical and surgical equipment for those who need it, as set forth in resolution 2286 (2016). I believe that the recommendations that the Secretary-General is preparing on the protection of personnel and medical facilities will help to put an end to such attacks as soon as possible.

The situation on the ground continues to be extremely serious, as the Secretary-General's latest monthly report (S/2016/714) on the implementation of the humanitarian obligations of the parties to the conflict leaves very few words to express the suffering of the Syrian people. In his report, the Secretary-General stresses that it is vital to ensure that there is a 48-hour humanitarian pause in Aleppo as well as safe and lasting humanitarian access to the city. We welcome the fact that, at the meeting of the Humanitarian Task Force in Geneva on 18 August, the two Chairs of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) agreed to support Special Envoy De Mistura's initiative for a 48-hour humanitarian pause.

It is of the utmost importance that such pause be put into practice on the ground and that it should be done on a weekly basis so that there is access for humanitarian workers and medical personnel to the civilian population in order to provide assistance to that population and, if necessary, voluntary evacuation with appropriate security and neutrality guarantees. It is also important that the water and electricity supply systems be repaired, which is urgently required. We therefore urge the Chairs of the ISSG and all those States that have any influence on the parties to the conflict to make every effort not to miss this opportunity to ensure that the parties respect the ceasefire and thereby allow humanitarian access to the population, in compliance with their obligations under international law.

Finally, we hope that the talks between the parties can soon be renewed in order to put an end the conflict under the terms set forth in resolution 2254 (2015). But we should not forget that the obligations of the parties under international humanitarian law are independent of any other consideration. The fact remains that we must continue to work urgently to ensure that resolution 2254 (2015) is fully implemented. For our part, we will continue to support the work of the ISSG Chairs with concrete proposals, as we have been doing so far.

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine): First of all, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his customary detailed and moving account of the situation in Syria. I assure him that Ukraine fully supports his urgent call for 48-hour humanitarian pauses in that country.

Before going directly to the subject, I would like condemn in the strongest terms the recent terrorist attack in Gaziantep and to express Ukraine's sincere condolences and solidarity with the people and the Government of Turkey.

The latest report (S/2016/714) of the Secretary-General on today's subject does not, as usual, leave much room for optimism. We continue to see the same parade of horrors and breaches of commitment. The image of Omran Daqneesh, a little boy in Aleppo who managed to escape death despite the raining down on him of shelling and bombs reportedly launched by the combined Syrian and Russian forces, is going to haunt us all as a sign of our collective failure to bring peace to Syria and prevent the unfolding tragedy in Aleppo — or, in the words of Under-Secretary-General O'Brien, as a sign of humanitarian shame upon us all.

According to independent non-governmental organizations present on the ground, 233 civilians, including 142 children, were killed in indiscriminate exchanges of fire between the rebels and Government forces in the first two weeks of August alone. It is impossible to comprehend that the Syrian Government continues to bomb its citizens. Mr. Al-Assad is still keeping the Syrian people hostage to his own and his allies' plans to change the equation on the ground. How long can we allow the Syrian regime to kill its own people in the name of fighting terrorists?

The deteriorating security environment in Syria continues to have a negative impact on the humanitarian situation. Military activities, air strikes and shelling go unabated on all active fronts of the Syrian battlefield — Aleppo, Idlib, Homs and Hama, among other places. It all results in a further increase in the number of people living in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. We therefore welcome all efforts exerted to alleviate the situation, particularly the resumption and due functioning of the Al-Ramtha border crossing on the Jordanian-Syrian border.

Like the delegation of the United Kingdom, we are increasingly alarmed by accounts of the extensive use of incendiary weapons by Russia. Especially revealing

was the report published by Human Rights Watch on 16 August, mentioned previously, according to which these devastating weapons were used at least 18 times over the past nine weeks, including recent attacks on the opposition-held areas in Aleppo and Idlib on 7 August. There is no shortage of data with regard to the use of such weapons in Syria, and we repeat our call on the Secretariat to follow up on this matter and to present its findings to the Security Council.

It is equally extremely alarming that the Russian Federation is moving a new types of arms- and bomb-carriers to bases in closer proximity to Syria. This positioning can hardly be interpreted as the confidence-building measure needed to bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

We are also concerned about the cruise-missile strikes carried out by the Russian Black Sea Fleet warships from the waters of the Mediterranean at targets near Aleppo on 20 August. The efficiency of those air strikes is doubtful, since it is not yet known whether militants from the Jabat Fateh Al-Sham or those who are considered to be members of the moderate opposition were targeted. We look forward to the Russian Federation providing the Security Council with all the necessary information in that respect.

Finally, we join the United Nations and our colleagues in calling on all the parties to the conflict to immediately provide unconditional, unimpeded and sustained access to the people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas across Syria. As I already mentioned, we support the United Nations-led efforts to impose a 48-hour pause in fighting in Aleppo province. It needs to be stressed that this pause should not be a window of opportunity for the regime and its allies to regroup their forces, but rather a vital chance and opportunity for humanitarian relief to reach the population of Aleppo. The decision of Special Envoy De Mistura to adjourn the International Syria Support Group Humanitarian Task Force in Geneva on 18 August is a strong sign of concern in that respect.

Mr. Gimolieca (Angola): We thank Mr. O'Brien for his comprehensive briefing and for his continuing commitment to the humanitarian relief efforts in Syria.

In the past few weeks, we have reiterated on numerous occasions our collective resolve to address the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria, with particular regard to the situation in Aleppo.

Unfortunately our calls for immediate, unhindered and complete humanitarian access to all areas of Syria, including Aleppo, continue to fall on deaf ears. Even Special Envoy De Mistura decided to cancel his latest meeting with the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) humanitarian task force out of frustration for lack of significant change on the ground. It is crucial that the ISSG members, as well as members of the Security Council continue to make comprehensive efforts to get all the parties to the conflict to accept the proposal for recovering substantial pauses in the fighting, which would ensure sustained humanitarian deliveries via cross-line and cross-border convoys to areas most in need, notably Aleppo. The humanitarian and political track are intrinsically linked, and it is therefore important to continue these efforts because the pauses can lead not only to improved humanitarian assistance but also to more room for constructive dialogue on potential long-term cessations of hostilities.

To conclude, we wish to offer our support to the proposed initiative by Mr. O'Brien for allowing more humanitarian corridors and assistance to Syrians in need. We sincerely hope that all sides to the conflict will be receptive to those proposals and allow for civilians to escape the fighting by guaranteeing voluntary, free movement, including for those in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

We also reiterate our support for the humanitarian task force of the ISSG and hope that the parties to the conflict will cooperate with efforts to ensure immediate, unhindered and complete humanitarian access to the people of Syria. It is important that we redouble our efforts to ensure that our proposals are met, in particular concerning the cessation of hostilities, considering the growing threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Al-Nusrah Front and all other individual groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida or ISIL, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the Security Council.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien for his briefing and for his commitment to and engagement in saving the lives of the people of Syria. Last December, the Council gathered in this Chamber to unanimously adopt resolution 2254 (2015), and expressed hope about advances in the political process (see S/PV.7588). Then, in February, we adopted resolution 2268 (2016), endorsing the cessation of hostilities agreement. And now, six months later, it

is hard to believe that only half a year ago, we were discussing a cessation of hostilities for all of Syria.

Today, the picture is terribly different. For the past month, our attention has centred on Aleppo, and Castello Road in particular. We are far from being able to discuss a nationwide cessation of hostilities, and instead find ourselves focused on a very particular area. It pains me to see how badly the situation in Syria has deteriorated. Many of us have been reminded of the scope of the tragedy through the heartbreaking image of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh. I was horrified to see the dust and blood covering Omran's young face, but the brave hospital and aid workers on the ground tell us that there are many, many more children just like Omran in Syria today.

So what can we do? Humanitarian efforts are under way, and we are urging all influential parties to do their part. But we should all be deeply troubled to see such a catastrophe continue unresolved. In his latest report (S/2016/714), the Secretary-General urges the United States and the Russian Federation, the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) co-chairs, to rapidly reach an agreement for a ceasefire in Aleppo and beyond. Japan appreciates the co-chairs' efforts to improve the situation on the ground, and joins the Secretary-General in urging an agreement as soon as possible.

At the same time, I also want to urge all parties to redouble their efforts to prevent the tragedy in Syria from getting any worse. United Nations humanitarian aid must move firmly forward, and the Four Towns agreement must be implemented. This is the time for influential countries in the region to play a leading role.

I also want to take a moment to express my profound gratitude to our United Nations and non-governmental organization colleagues on the ground, who are risking their lives to help the people of Syria even as the fighting worsens. I also urge the Syrian Government and all related parties to use caution to ensure the safety of the people.

I understand that the Russian Federation has expressed its readiness to support a 48-hour military pause in Aleppo. That would be a hugely important step in changing the situation in Aleppo. In order for that to happen, and for United Nations and non-governmental organizations to safely access the area, the cooperation of opposition forces is also essential. We should appeal to the Syrian Government, opposition forces and all influential parties in that regard. The international community is watching to see whether the Security Council and the ISSG can improve the situation on the ground. Our credibility is on the line.

The besieged areas and parts of Aleppo will demand our attention for some time to come. However, once a pause or ceasefire is attained, and in parallel with the pursuit of a political solution, we also should consider how we can support early recovery and strengthen the resilience of Syrian society. Most importantly, we should provide livelihoods, rehabilitate social infrastructure and strengthen social cohesion, thereby providing hope to individuals and communities in Syria facing very difficult challenges. The international community must invest in preparedness and resilience in Syrian society in order to prevent recurrent crises.

Mr. Méndez Graterol (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, and his team for their work in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela welcomes the humanitarian progress registered in Syria in the month of July. Over 480,000 people received humanitarian assistance, amounting to 40 per cent. It is also important to highlight that since the beginning of the year, humanitarian agencies have been able to access 68 per cent of the besieged populations on more than one occasion, benefiting over 400,000 people. Of particular interest is the work carried out by UNICEF in helping 214,000 Syrian children who are in hard-to-reach areas, as well as the immunization campaigns carried out by the World Health Organization.

We understand that the situation is not ideal, given that clashes continue in various parts of Syria, in particular in Aleppo besieged by armed groups linked to Al-Qaida. We condemn the criminal activities that have led to the loss of human life. We are concerned that the situation on the ground could threaten the progress made since the cessation of hostilities was declared. In that regard, we are convinced that the humanitarian issue must be addressed impartially and deliberately in order to avoid its politicization. It is a question of ending the siege of the civilian population. We reiterate that the Government of Syria has the responsibility to protect its citizens, as it has been doing in the areas under its control and even beyond. The Council should therefore step up its efforts to find a political and peaceful solution to the armed conflict.

We hope that both Russia and the United States, as referenced in the Secretary-General report (S/2016/714), can continue to find areas of understanding to bring about a strong and lasting peace in this Arab country. Under the Venezuelan presidency (see S/PV.7634), the Council adopted resolution 2268 (2016), creating the political space to help the civilian population with its most urgent needs. We call upon the co-chairs of the International Syrian Support Group to pursue their bilateral consultations aimed at implementing the provisions of the resolution. The text of the resolution points out that terrorist organizations should not be protected by the cessation of hostilities but fought by all means necessary under international law.

We also welcome the proposals of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) concerning 48-hour pauses, as well as the recent announcements made by the Russians concerning the establishment of humanitarian corridors in Aleppo and other parts of Syria. We stress the importance of raising the sieges on all affected cities in accordance with resolution 2268 (2016). We condemn sieges because they run counter to international humanitarian law. In that context, we are aware that in some cases, conditions on the ground make it difficult for humanitarian organizations to do their work. We therefore pay tribute to their efforts in such adverse and very dangerous conditions. We reiterate that they cannot be allowed to become military targets, much less actors in the armed conflict. Their sole task is to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need, in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law. Their work however must be coordinated with the State concerned in conformity with international law.

In the context of intense armed confrontations, we condemn the destruction of basic infrastructure, such as hospitals and water and electricity installations. Despite the adoption of resolution 2268 (2016), attacks continue against hospitals and basic services, exacerbating the difficult humanitarian situation already being endured by those affected by the armed conflict. We also recognize what has been done to remedy the situation by the Syrian Government and the World Food Programme, which benefit 4.1 million people and completed 87 parachute drops, to help the people in Deir ez-Zor.

As mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, Al-Raqqa is also one of the areas where humanitarian needs have increased. We reiterate our condemnation of the systematic practices of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) involving the denial of civilian access to humanitarian aid, forced executions, criminal actions perpetrated against members of ethnic minorities and women, and the recruitment of children in areas under its control. Such actions violate international humanitarian law and international human rights law and constitute war crimes for which their authors must be brought to justice.

ISIS, the Al-Nusrah Front and their associates have become a serious threat to peace and stability in the region. Their influence must be fought by all means possible. We reiterate that humanitarian assistance operations are linked to the end of the conflict. Accordingly, we reiterate our support for the peace efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to find a political and peaceful solution to the armed conflict in Syria. The complex humanitarian situation in Syria requires that the parties sit down to negotiate without preconditions for the benefit of the people of the country.

Finally, we call on the parties and those actors who have an influence upon them to resume political negotiations as soon as possible. As has been reiterated by all members of the Council, the solution is political and therefore efforts must be redoubled to make this goal a possibility. If the conflict is not settled, there will only be more suffering and the further resurgence of terrorism in Syria.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank Under Secretary-General O'Brien for his briefing. As we have heard from Under Secretary-General O'Brien and other colleagues, last week the world's attention was indeed transfixed by the shocked, blank stare of 5-year-old Omran Daqneesh, who looked out from the back of an ambulance after having been pulled from the rubble of his family's destroyed apartment building in eastern Aleppo. Perhaps, most striking, however, was Omran's silence. Even as the dust, debris and dried blood covered the young boy's face, he did not cry out, scream out for help and did not even call for his parents. All that Omran could do was look straight ahead and wipe the dirt from his hands on the ambulance seat.

Let us just pause and consider for a moment how much trauma little Omran must have experienced to react to the collapse of his home without even making a single sound. But let us also consider what will happen next for Omran and a generation of Syrian children like him, who have known nothing but war. Omran

may now be discharged from one of the few remaining hospitals in eastern Aleppo, but he still faces the horror of Russian and Syrian air strikes that pummel his neighbourhood daily. As we learned over the weekend, Omran's older brother Ali died from the injuries that he received in the air strike, the result of the Al-Assad's regime wilful attacks to cut off eastern Aleppo.

Across Syria, the Al-Assad regime is drawing upon Russian assistance to escalate the conflict. Fronts that have been relatively quiet in recent months are once again being bombed by the regime. In Daraa governorate, for example, air strikes destroyed the town of Jasem's only hospital, and strikes against Busra al-Sham displaced thousands of people. In Idlib and Aleppo, Human Rights Watch has reported at least 18 attacks with incendiary weapons between 5 June and 10 August, which one resident of Idlib described as "blocks of flame falling from the sky". In the besieged community of Darayya, where it has been 74 days since the town's 4,000 residents have received a delivery of food or medicine from the United Nations, there are reports of civilians with burns that are consistent with napalm exposure, and we recall that yesterday marked the three-year anniversary of the gruesome chemical-weapons attack in Ghouta for which the United States remains determined to pursue accountability.

The Al-Assad regime has shown no hesitation whatsoever to employ the most gruesome tactics in pursuit of military gains, from launching starve-and-surrender sieges to shoving crudely made barrel bombs from helicopters. This is the regime that Russia is supporting with its own air strikes and military advisers. The fighting is getting worse and so are the humanitarian consequences. The Al-Assad regime has failed month after month to provide for unfettered humanitarian access. This month, no United Nations conveys have departed, largely because of the Al-Assad regime's absurd bureaucratic obstructions. The regime has allowed no assistance for the people of eastern Aleppo this month. That affects up to 275,000 Syrians under siege. It has been nearly four months since Madaya, Zabadani, Al-Fouah and Kefraya received aid. More than two months have passed since aid has reached the besieged community of Al-Waer.

While the United States condemns all parties to the conflict who use siege tactics, we must be clear that the Al-Assad regime and international backers are responsible for 78 per cent Syrians living under siege, the overwhelming majority. Aleppo is facing the threat of a double siege, with the regime bombarding the east and the opposition forces attacking the west. Some 1.8 million people, living in both sides of Aleppo, could be trapped and cut off from assistance unless all parties take immediate steps to allow for unfettered humanitarian access and unfettered humanitarian deliveries.

Last week, Russia announced its support for the United Nations proposal to organize 48-hour weekly pauses in Aleppo, the bare minimum amount of time the United Nations needs to deliver aid. The United States supports such pauses, which could give Aleppo's residents a reprieve from daily bombardments and allow aid to get in. It is imperative that all armed groups in Aleppo respect the pauses and work with the United Nations to provide access to both sides of the city. We need to see Russia follow its unilateral declaration with genuine steps to support regular and sustained access to Aleppo. The pauses are not the solution to the problem of humanitarian deliveries. That requires a more comprehensive arrangement that revives the cessation of hostilities and ensures unimpeded humanitarian access nationwide. In the meantime, the people of Aleppo need the help of the United Nations right now.

Another key factor that compounds Syria's humanitarian suffering is the Al-Assad regime's repeated destruction of hospitals and medical facilities. We have heard of six health-care centres, hospitals and laboratories hit by air strikes in the past five days. In Dara'a, one of the first buildings struck after the regime's escalation of air strikes in late July was the Al-Radwan field hospital, which served more than 400,000 people, many of whom had fled violence in other parts of Syria. Air strikes had already destroyed the hospital twice, and the resilient people of Dara'a invested what little they had to rebuild the hospital both times. Local leaders must again make a gut-wrenching choice — try to rebuild the hospital a third time, only to see those resources potentially squandered by a future air strike, or give up and leave the people of Dara'a without critical medical care.

The shortage of medical care in eastern Aleppo is prompting calls for medical evacuation, which the Al-Assad regime persistently ignores. In July, five of eastern Aleppo's nine hospitals were struck, and only 35 doctors are left working. Those heroic doctors simply do not have the tools, the equipment or the medicine to provide the care that so many Syrians injured by the fighting desperately need.

On 8 August, Dr. Zaher Sahloul, of the Syrian American Medical Society, told members of the Security Council about 10-year-old Shahad, a little girl critically injured when the Al-Assad regime dropped a barrel bomb on her house. While Shahad's wounds were serious, the doctor believed at the time that she could be saved with proper treatment, including a computerized tomography scan for diagnostics, which was not available to anyone in eastern Aleppo. Just one day after Dr. Sahloul talked with us about the urgent need for Shahad to be evacuated, the little girl died. She was just one among countless men, women and children who might have been saved but for the Al-Assad regime's siege tactics.

The steps that the parties need to take to fix this situation are well known. The Al-Assad regime must recognize that there is no military solution to the conflict. Those who enable and support Al-Assad's attacks, including Russia, must use their influence to bring the bombardments to an end. While we continue to negotiate for a resumption of the cessation of hostilities, Al-Assad's sieges, barrel bombs, strikes on medical facilities, obstruction of aid and use of incendiary weapons will make that goal ever-harder to attain. Negotiations require a show of good faith, but the Al-Assad regime has instead chosen to expand the fighting on the ground and deepen the suffering of the Syrian people.

I would conclude with just one more thought. Last Friday, 19 August, was World Humanitarian Day, a day on which we honour those who have been killed trying to help others and those who risk their lives every day to relieve suffering. In Syria, hundreds of United Nations staff, Red Crescent staff and volunteers, workers in non-governmental organizations, doctors, nurses and White Helmet first-responders, like the late Khaled Omar Harrah, whose death Stephen O'Brien just noted, have all paid the ultimate price for their selflessness and bravery in the line of duty. At an event in the General Assembly Hall last Friday evening to mark World Humanitarian Day, Hala Kamil, a brave Syrian mother, whose family of four children fled Aleppo and who is featured in the *Frontline: Children of Syria* documentary, spoke to a jam-packed Hall. Hala said,

> "I do not agree with those out there who say that there are two worlds, one for the political decision-makers and one for those who bear the consequences of their decisions. We who suffer those consequences must have some bearing on the actions or lack of action of the powerful."

We should be guided by Hala's voice and the voices of the many Syrians who stand up every day to demand peace and help those who are suffering. To honour their sacrifices, we cannot continue to relay the same list of horrors, the same list but with different names, month after month, while Syria is descending into an irreparable state. Instead, there must an end to the sieges, an end to the barrel bombs and an end to the strikes on civilians. Only then will Syrians like Hala Kamil and her children, Sara, Farah, Helen and Mohammed, be able to contemplate a different and more humane future.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to begin my statement with the idea that Mr. O'Brien used to finish his statement. Mr. O'Brien said that the humanitarian tragedy was the consequence of a political failure. We can only agree with that idea. Did they think of the consequences when they invaded Iraq, which led to the formation of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)? Did they think of the humanitarian consequences when they created a spiral of violence in Syria, or when they filled the country with weapons, not shying away from giving support to terrorists, who turned into the main anti-Government forces?

The humanitarian situation continues to be very difficult. The Syrian Government, under very difficult military conditions caused by a war that is being waged by terrorist groups and other illegal armed groups incapable, or unwilling, to dissociate themselves from them, is doing everything it can to ensure that the civilian population has a more or less normal life. It is doing this despite the unilateral economic sanctions.

We can only call heroic the work of the Syrian Red Crescent. Significant work has been undertaken by specialized United Nations agencies and through bilateral cooperation with new countries that have become involved. Russia continues to provide active humanitarian support to the Syrian people. Last week, poor families in the town of Marmarita, Homs province, received 2 tons of humanitarian aid, 6 tons was given to a home for children in Aleppo and an airdrop provided 17 tons of United Nations aid to the town of Deir ez-Zor, which has been besieged by the terrorists. Work is under way to define the parameters for humanitarian pauses, including a 48-hour ceasefire

in Aleppo, together with the participation of United Nations specialized agencies. Nevertheless, we strongly believe that the humanitarian pauses must not be used by fighters to replenish their resources and regroup, as has taken place in the past. We hope that the sponsors of the opposition will be able to ensure that those groups show willingness to negotiate and respect the conditions of any future agreements.

We continue to work for intra-Syrian reconciliation. According to data from the Russian centre for reconciliation of opposing sides in Hmeymim, the number of towns that have joined the reconciliation process has now increased to 444. In the past 24 hours, agreements were signed with representatives of five towns in the provinces of Latakia and Homs. The number of armed groups that have indicated their commitment to the cessation of hostilities has remained unchanged at 69. The agreement has been respected in most provinces of the Syrian Arab Republic. However, its full implementation continues to be impeded by terrorist organizations such as Jabhat Al-Nusra, ISIL and those cooperating with those terrorist groups.

It is still obvious to us that radically altering the humanitarian situation in Syria will be impossible unless we continue the fight against the terrorists. We must ensure that the moderate opposition is uncoupled from the ISIL and Jabhat Al-Nusra terrorists. Back in February, our American colleagues promised to do that, but they have not yet done so. Jabhat Al-Nusra has changed its name to Jabhat Fateh Al-Sham, but nothing has changed in substance. In that respect, we are very concerned at the statement of the so-called High Negotiations Committee welcoming this step, which shows there are links between them and terrorists. The Security Council has, on many occasions, taken decisions according to which those who are on the side of terrorists or support them should themselves be considered terrorists. That is a basic principle. We stress that focusing efforts on countering terrorism does not mean that we should underplay the importance of providing humanitarian aid or prevent it from happening.

I would like to recall that, working with the Syrian Government, we have established six humanitarian corridors for the peaceful population, who, if they wish, can leave eastern Aleppo. However, in order to ensure a lasting resolution to the humanitarian situation in Aleppo, it is vital not to allow the use of the humanitarian channels to supply terrorists with fighters, munitions and weapons. Unfortunately, we have encountered such misuse in the past, when, during pauses, extremists have resupplied and restocked their stockpiles. Therefore, we also need to strengthen control over freight movements across the Turkish-Syrian border.

The difficult situation facing the civilian population in Syria is the result of a long-running war, and it can be ended only through political means. But how is the situation any better for, for example, the civilian population in Yemen? It is clear that weeping over some tragedies while fuelling others is a deliberate approach utilized by certain capitals. What have those who talk loudly about the humanitarian situation in Syria done in order to resolve it? We do not hear any accounts from them of what has been done to achieve specific results in that country. Where is the pressure on the opposition to stop the use of such horrible methods for waging war and the use of hellish explosive devices and suicide bombers? When has the opposition been called upon to enact a ceasefire, in Damascus for example? What work is being done with supporters of Ahrar Al-Sham to have them cease their actions and implement the Istanbul four towns agreement and allow aid to enter areas that are besieged? Have they demanded that the opposition put an end to preventing civilians from leaving eastern Aleppo through the humanitarian corridors set up under the Russian initiative? The Islamists are not allowing the civilian population to leave and are targeting the corridors. Rather than putting practical pressure on the fighters, some are putting up a media curtain around the terrorist and criminal activity taking place.

Unfortunately, some members of the Security Council at times conduct their discussions improperly, dishonestly, making provocative insinuations in the Council with regard to Russian Air Force operations, but they do not mention their own illegitimate actions. As is well known, on 19 July, aircraft of the coalition led by the United States bombed a town in the area of Manbij, with more than 90 strikes, resulting in the deaths of dozens of people and injuries to hundreds of others, including women and children. Armed groups of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces besieged the town, with street fighting in residential areas, and no assistance was given to the Syrian population. The only way they could get out on 19 July was to pass through the firing directed against them, and approximately 200 people were killed.

Nevertheless, no steps to avoid the death of civilians have been taken by the coalition. On 28 July, coalition air strikes against Al-Ghandour led to the death of 28 civilians, including seven children, and left 10 more wounded. Since then, and for the second time, we have been discussing the humanitarian situation in Syria, but not a word has been said about the events and the participation of the opposition. We would like to call on our Western partners to stop their rhetoric and to look in the mirror more often, look at what they are doing and what the people they sponsor are doing. If they do that, then maybe the tragedy will end.

In conclusion, it is necessary to continue efforts to encourage parties to reach a peaceful solution on the basis of international agreements. We call upon all those who have any influence on the opposition to convince them to adopt a negotiating position that will allow them to truly move forward to a political settlement. Without that, and without effectively combating terrorism, the necessary radical improvement in the humanitarian situation in Syria is impossible.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate Mr. Stephen O'Brien for his efforts in addressing the Syrian crisis and to thank him and all humanitarian workers who make daily sacrifices in that connection. I would also like to thank Mr. O'Brien for the clarity with which he presented the thirtieth report of the Secretary-General on Syria (S/2016/714), which enables us to look beyond the humanitarian situation and consider the difficult political and security situation in that country.

As my delegation pointed out during the previous briefing, the cessation of hostilities, which is fundamental for the provision of humanitarian assistance and a prerequisite for finding a political solution, seems seriously compromised. In that connection, our primary concern continues to be possible clashes between the Syrian army and the armed opposition groups, particularly in several governorates — for instance, Deir ez-Zor, Idlib, Rif Dimashq and Aleppo — where bombardment continues to claim many victims, including women, children, the elderly and the vulnerable. Moreover, it is worth noting that, in addition to claiming hundreds of victims, the violence has led to the displacement of tens of thousands of people, particularly in Idlib, where 45,000 people have fled aerial bombardments.

Air strikes threaten to put between 250,000 and 275,000 people in Aleppo in a state of siege, owing to the 7 July closing of the Castello Road, the only access route to the eastern part of the city, a situation that has led to a significant hike in the prices of basic food supplies. It has also led to disastrous effects on children, who increasingly suffer from malnutrition and diseases associated with it.

Additionally, the escalation of clashes between Kurdish forces and the Government at Hasakah, in northern Syria, has resulted in more civilian victims and the displacement of many, while further complicating a conflict that is already difficult to resolve owing to the very many parties already involved. The besieged suburb of Al-Wair, inhabited by 100,000 people, is currently being targeted by Government forces, which have issued an ultimatum. Al-Wair has been lacking humanitarian assistance since last month and must continue to be on our radar.

I would also note the destruction of public infrastructure, such as markets, schools and health centres, 44 of which were targeted in July alone, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and resolution 2286 (2016). In that regard, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to once again remind the parties to the conflict, in particular the Syrian Government, of their obligation to respect human rights and international humanitarian law.

In the light of what I have said here, and in recognition of current efforts, particularly those undertaken by the Russian Federation, we reaffirm our support for the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations to implement weekly 48-hour ceasefires in order to take care of those in need. Furthermore, we urge the International Syria Support Group, in particular its co-chairs — the United States and the Russian Federation — to continue to bring their influence to bear on the parties, especially the Syrian Government, to effectively implement the ceasefires, which are so crucial to humanitarian efforts.

Although we commend the sustained efforts of humanitarian actors, particularly of United Nations agencies and the Syrian Red Crescent, in ensuring the provision of humanitarian assistance to thousand of Syrians, we must remember the major constraints that keep them from fully meeting the needs of the affected population. Moreover, the sharp increase in the number of people living in besieged and hard-to-

reach areas is regrettable. That number has gone from 4.6 million to 5.47 million, a significant increase of 900,000 people — primarily owing to violence, but also to administrative red tape and the obstruction on the part of the belligerent parties.

While we welcome progress in supplying aid to besieged and hard-to-access areas — particularly because access has been granted by the Government — we urge the Government to work towards ensuring that the goal of providing humanitarian access to 1.2 million people by August this year is reached. It is essential that the United Nations be granted ongoing access, as providing humanitarian assistance to people in need is — I would recall — an obligation under international humanitarian law. While we welcome the medical evacuation of 39 people from the besieged towns of Madaya and Fo'ah, among them children and the elderly, by the Syrian Red Crescent, we point out that numerous civilians, particularly children, in the four besieged towns — Fo'ah, Kafraya, Madaya and Zabadani — still remain to be evacuated under the humanitarian agreement on those towns. We continue to condemn the systematic practice of removing medical items from humanitarian convoys that are destined for people in critical condition, especially pregnant women.

In addition to those problems we should mention the dislocation of families, the early marriages and the child soldiers, problems that continue to affect Syrian children. On that subject, my delegation welcomes the ongoing efforts of UNICEF and its partners, which managed to provide multidimensional assistance to 214,000 children in July. We also welcome the ongoing vaccination campaign of the World Health Organization and UNICEF, a campaign that has made it possible to reach 1.07 million children. So far, approximately 86 per cent of the population still needs to be vaccinated.

The sacrifice on the part of medical and humanitarian staff for the Syrian people can be seen once again in the tragic losses and deaths that have occurred among the staff of the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for the Palestine Refugees in the Near East. On 16 July a humanitarian worker, Mr. Yaser Mahmoud Shuaeeb, was killed. We would like on this occasion to pay tribute to those brave men and women and call for the freeing of those who are still in detention.

In conclusion, the humanitarian and security situation in Syria is unacceptable, with more than 30 million people affected. That should speak to our collective conscience and lead us to take decisive action once and for all in order to bring about a lasting solution to the crisis that will, above all, enable the affected population to be able to return to their homes in security and dignity. I would also like to reiterate my delegation's call to those with influence, particularly the International Syria Support Group and its co-chairs, to concentrate more on the humanitarian situation, because we cannot stress enough that the unprecedented humanitarian situation in Syria is only a symptom of the political situation, which is getting worse day by day. It is also important to give every possible chance to the political process, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his briefing.

The conflicts in some parts of Syria have intensified lately, and the situation in Aleppo has escalated, causing extensive civilian casualties, which have summoned the attention of the international community. China is gravely concerned about the civilian casualties and the humanitarian crisis in Syria. We welcome Russia's support for the United Nations proposal for a weekly 48-hour humanitarian pause in Aleppo. We commend the efforts of the International Syria Support Group co-chairs — the United States and the Russian Federation. We hope that the parties concerned will urge the Government and the opposition in Syria to implement the cessation of hostilities agreement in good faith and facilitate the efforts of United Nations aid agencies to ease the humanitarian situation in Aleppo without delay.

China has been actively supporting the mitigation of the humanitarian situation in Syria and has provided, through multiple channels, several tranches of humanitarian aid, including food and supplies, for Syria and other countries in the region.

A political settlement to the Syrian situation is the ultimate way out for resolving the set of issues related to Syria, including the humanitarian problem. The international community should stay the course in the general direction of moving towards a political settlement, with an intensified effort to move the political settlement forward. Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura is actively pushing for a new round of Geneva peace talks as soon as possible. All parties in Syria should put Syria's national interests and the interests

of its people first and attend the Geneva peace talks to find a solution acceptable to all parties based on a step-wise approach. The international community, including other countries in the region, should support the leading role of the United Nations in the area of good offices and support the Special Envoy in his work, so as to sustain the momentum for a political settlement and ensure that the process can come to fruition.

Counter-terrorism is a challenge that must be confronted in the course of addressing the Syria issue. Terrorism in the region at large and in the Syrian territory in particular causes civilian casualties and hampers international relief efforts. The international community should strengthen coordination, uphold uniform standards and join forces to combat all the terrorist organizations in Syria that have been so designated by the Security Council in order to create enabling conditions for the achievement of a political solution.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the representative of Malaysia.

I join earlier speakers in thanking Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his briefing.

It has become all too familiar for us to hear the desperate plea of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs calling for us to respond to the critical humanitarian needs of civilians in the besieged and hard-to-reach areas in Syria, particularly the dire situation in Aleppo. On Friday, we commemorated World Humanitarian Day, a day designated to serve as an annual reminder for us to work to alleviate the suffering of innocents. It is a day that should strengthen our resolve, a day to honour the bravery of humanitarian actors delivering such needed assistance. It was indeed horrifying that what preceded that day was a stark reminder of how the world had slid into further disarray. The footage depicting young Omran Daqneesh, a 5-year-old Syrian boy, sitting impassively, despite his bloody face, has become a symbol of the struggling and the tragic consequences that the conflict has had for civilians, particularly children. It was a shocking and numbing experience. The significance of World Humanitarian Day came ironically with an ugly twist and a powerful reminder that more needs to be done in the Syrian context.

The Council has yet to pronounce itself on a weekly, 48-hour humanitarian pause in Aleppo, almost two months since it was first requested by the United Nations. The continuing silence from the Council runs contrary to its demand for a political solution as violence continues to escalate in Aleppo and beyond. An immediate response in support of a weekly humanitarian pause and a full endorsement for its implementation would have been ideal. Seven weeks on, the Russian Federation has expressed support for a humanitarian pause. We must urgently seize the opportunity to set our differences aside and pronounce an undivided validation or endorsement of the humanitarian pause to begin this week.

The agreement, however, is just the first step, as we continue to hope for the warring parties to respect and implement a two-day truce. It is also important to stress that the humanitarian pause must not be a one-off event, it has to be sustained in the long run.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to remind the parties to the cessation of hostilities of their responsibilities in connection with the terms signed in February. We hope that eventually talks will prevail and the bloodshed in Aleppo and other cities in Syria will end. While the insurgent fighting in Aleppo has shifted our focus from other cities in Syria, I would be remiss not to echo the sentiment expressed by Under-Secretary-General O'Brien about the challenges for the delivery of assistance to other besieged and hard-to-reach areas. We urge all the parties to ensure that humanitarian access be provided to those towns. As often seen in recent weeks, such access should not be deliberately impeded.

This week is a crucial week for Syria. In addition to the all-important humanitarian pause in Aleppo, which hopefully will pave the way for an increase in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians, Mr. De Mistura is also scheduled to resume the intra-Syrian peace talks in Geneva. We have repeatedly underscored that a political solution is the only way forward, and we reaffirm our support for the United Nations-facilitated talks towards a political solution to the Syrian conflict. We are hopeful that a greater push could be made for the resumption of political dialogue without preconditions. We hope that a more sustained truce or cessation of hostilities among the various parties, particularly between the Government and opposition forces, could be worked out urgently. As articulated by many stakeholders, a reduction in violence essentially would alleviate the dire humanitarian crisis faced by ordinary Syrians — a goal that to date, unfortunately,

has eluded us, and the consequences of which led to untold human sufferings. We must put an end to this.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arabic Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Before I begin my statement, I would like to say to the members of the Security Council that we reject those who consider us responsible for the bombing of the Katarji neighbourhood in Khaled. The Russian Government has also rejected that accusation. Therefore, the perpetrator must be elsewhere. I would like to shed light on the fact that the tragedy in that neighbourhood is directly linked to what some colleagues mentioned with regard the little Syrian boy Omran, who came from Venus or from Mercury. That Syrian boy is just like all other Syrian children who dream — and like the scores of others who have suffered, directly or indirectly, from the conflict in Syria and the conspiracy against it.

Also before going into the substance of my statement, I would like to recall certain incidents that may refresh the memory of some members of the Council in order that they can distinguish between what is true and what is not.

On 30 April 2014, aerial forces of the so-called international alliance destroyed a centre for the deaf and mute in Raqqah, causing the deaths of dozens of children. On 7 July 2016, the same so-called international alliance inaugurated the so-called liberation operation Manbij, using heavy aerial bombardment targeting the inhabitants of the city and leading to the death or injury of hundreds of men, women and children, all civilians. On 12 July 2016, the fighters of the so-called international alliance bombed the town of As-Susa in Deir ez-Zor, causing the deaths of over 80 people, including women and children. On 26 July 2016, the French Air force, a partner in the so-called international alliance, bombed greater Tokhar, a village in the Khaled area, causing the deaths of more than 180 civilians, many of whom were women and children. The self-proclaimed international alliance did not request any approval from the Syrian Government to conduct air operations, nor did the Syrian Government invite it to come to our country — on the contrary. That is a flagrant violation of the fundamental principles of this international organization. I will return to this issue later.

The victims who fell in Khaled are Syrian civilians. The victims who fell in Damascus are Syrian civilians as well. And the victims who fell in Idlib and Dar'a, Raqqah, Deir ez-Zor and other cities and towns are also Syrian civilians. No one in the world cares for the lives of those Syrians or feels their pain more than us, the people and the Government of Syria. No one but us is paying the heavy toll for this terrorist war that has been imposed against my country. The question that should be raised is, Why are those civilians being targeted? Who is killing them? And why, in fact, is there a humanitarian crisis in Syria? Before I answer that question, I would like to read Council members the text of Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter of the United Nations:

> "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."

Five-and-a-half years ago, Syria was one of the world's safest and most stable countries. It was self-sufficient in terms of basic needs, such as food, medication, health and education. Syria was one of the foremost hosts of refugees, for whom we did not build camps or tents and whose pain and suffering we did not exploit. We did not use their tears and suffering in those so-called international pledging conferences. We hosted them in our homes. We sent them to our schools and treated them in our health-care centres, until some of them returned to their homes, while others remained in Syria. They were Iraqi refugees, our brothers and sisters from Iraq, who left their country and took asylum in Syria because of the Anglo-American invasion of that country, as members well know.

That situation changed dramatically when Arab, regional and international States met in Tunisia on 24 February 2012 under the so-called "friends of the Syrian people". That "friendship" with the Syrian people resulted innovative means of murder, from decapitation to the eating of human parts, the slaughter of archeologists, various forms of destruction, displacement, the plunder of factories, crops, grain silos, oil and gas facilities, monuments and other infrastructure, as well as the siege of the Syrian people. We would like to take this opportunity to thank those

who brought us this fatal friendship, which will never be forgotten by the Syrian people.

Following that, the so-called international alliance was formed on the pretext of fighting terrorism — without United Nations approval or that of the Syrian Government. It began to target innocent civilians and infrastructure in Syria, including roads, bridges, refineries, schools and hospitals. The cost of the destruction as a result of those attacks by the international alliance in terms of just oil and gas facilities amounts to at least $2 billion. In fact, an attack in Aleppo against the sole electrical plant — which cost the Syrian people €1.3 billion — resulted in its total destruction, by the American doves of peace in a single air strike.

As a matter of fact, the party foremost responsible for the suffering of Syrian civilians are the Governments that have falsely claimed — from the very beginning of the war against Syria — to be friends of the Syrian people. Some have opened their borders to tens of thousands of mercenary terrorists from all over the world. Others have recruited those mercenary terrorists — either by using money or promising them paradise and heavenly maidens for their jihad — who abuse women in the most shameful way, for the first time ever in history under the banner of "fornication jihad". Other countries have smuggled thousands of tons of every sort of weapon to terrorists, set up training centres for them, recruited children for them and taught them how to carry out the most horrible terrorist operations. Yet others have opened up their coffers to them, their oil and gas resources, providing billions of dollars in order to finance the terrorist war against Syria. Still others have instructed the scholars of strife to issue Wahabi edicts to legitimize branding othes as infidels the killing of civilians, the plunder of their property and the defiling of their women and desecration of their holy places. Still others have dedicated their media and political forums to legitimizing those groups by sometimes calling them the "moderate opposition", and at other times "armed moderate opposition"; whereas now they are termed "non-State armed groups", as referred to by Mr. O'Brien in his briefing. Most recently, they have been called the "vetted Syrian opposition". Perhaps that nomenclature will soon change to "groups of armed angels".

Those States did not stop at supporting the terrorism against Syria, they complemented it with despicable economic terrorism via unilateral coercive measures that have exacerbated the suffering of Syrians, forcing them to flee their homes for better lives.

Allow me to briefly refer to the "moderate opposition" in order to tell the Council of some elements of such "moderate" opposition — genetically altered in the laboratories of the intelligence agencies of certain well-known countries. I would mention Abou Omar Al-Shisheni, Abou Al-Meqdad Al-Turki, Abou Moussab Al-Saudi, Abou Souhaib Al-Libi, Abou John Al-Britani, Abou Mohammed Al-Tunsi, Abou Hourrairah Al-Ameriki, Abou Mouath Al-Turkistani, Abou Hassah Al-Misri, Abou Abdelrahman Al-Canadi, Abou Abdallah Al-Urduni, Abou Talha Al-Kuwaiti, Abou Murrah Al-Fransi, Abou Aoud Al-Belgiki and Abou Walid Al-Walid Al-Australi. I would also mention the religious mufti of the Al-Nusra Front, Abdulaha Mohassini, who is Saudi. Those are the faces of the "moderate armed opposition" in Syria.

Aleppo remained safe and stable for more than a year and a half following the beginning of the so-called crisis in Syria — until the Governments of Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia prompted armed terrorist groups to attack the city, wreak havoc on people and property and use the population as human shields. Destruction has reigned. They have obliterated cultural, religious and historic property. They burned Souk Al-Medina — the city's ancient marketplace, the oldest in the world. They targeted the Umayyad Mosque, one of the oldest in the Islamic world. They destroyed the Carlton Hotel and tried to wreck the city's citadel as well. Those are all "achievements" by the opposition to the Syrian regime — the regime, not the Government and not the State. What did escape the terrible destruction was plundered, dismantled and transferred to Turkey — an instance of overt theft unprecedented in history. We have provided the Council with numerous documents to prove those despicable acts by the gangs supported by the Turkish intelligence services.

Aleppo having been destroyed — over which some shed crocodile tears today — was once home to 4 million civilians. Today there are only neighbourhoods in which armed terrorist groups are active. A mere 250,000 people remain in the city. After the terrorist forces began to target the inhabitants, 1.75 million fled Aleppo to seek refuge in areas under the control of Syrian Government institutions in various cities, where they found protection and assistance. Civilians do not flee to areas controlled by the terrorists, but to areas controlled by the State, which provides 75 per

cent of all the humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people — it is not the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The efforts of the Syrian Government in Aleppo today, with the support of its friends and allies, is a constitutional duty to protect civilians from the actions of armed terrorist groups that have violated the cessation of hostilities from the first day. Groups allied with the Al-Nusra Front, which was not originally involved in the cessation of hostilities, have daily rained hundreds of rockets and mortars down on Aleppo, some weighing more than a ton, causing the deaths of hundreds of men, women and children and the destruction of infrastructure and public and private property.

Against that backdrop, before taking any military action, the President of the Republic issued decree No.15 on 28 July 2016 to the effect that general amnesty would be granted to all those who bore or owned arms for any reason, or were fugitives or in hiding. On 26 July, the General Command of the Army and the armed forces sent several messages to civilians and armed actors in the eastern neighbourhoods of Aleppo, calling on them to join the national reconciliation and expel the foreign mercenaries. It established safe humanitarian corridors and temporary housing for them, particularly for those who want safe egress so as to protect their lives and provide for their needs. The Government also called upon the armed actors to lay down their weapons and resolve their issues. As a matter of fact, that has enabled hundreds of families to leave the eastern neighbourhoods of Aleppo, to whom the Syrian Government has provided temporary housing and basic needs. Regrettably, other families were not able to leave because they were prevented from doing so by armed terrorist groups. Those groups have intentionally used families as human shields and have booby-trapped access to the safe corridors. They have also used snipers to target them, as other terrorist groups have done, in cities such as Raqqa, Mambij, Al-Bab and Deir ez-Zor.

My Government questions the continued and deliberate distortion of facts and the use of unreliable sources in the reports of the Secretariat on the humanitarian situation in Syria. Any report issued by the United Nations is expected to be based on neutral and reliable sources, not on what are known to be "open" sources or centres of opposition located outside of the country and run and financed by foreign intelligence entities that have taken a hostile position vis-à-vis the Syrian Government in an attempt to distort its image internationally and level false accusations against it without any tangible proof. Those reports, deliberately or not, also cover up actions carried out by armed terrorist groups by continuing to call them — as I have mentioned — "armed opposition", at times, and, at other times, referring to them as 'non-State armed groups", among other names.

Regrettably, the Secretariat has created a historic precedent within the United Nations by justifying the egregious terrorist crime perpetrated by Nour al-Din al-Zenki, which decapitated a Palestinian child in Aleppo. The report attempts to convey legitimacy on that group by mentioning that it had issued a communiqué comdemning the act and stating that those responsible for it had been detained and handed over to an investigation committee. It is as if the report is saying that the practices of such terrorist groups, through their recruitment and killing of children, is allowed and its leaders are bound by international law and human rights law, having become party to the International Criminal Court.

Please allow me to quote from a recent book by the Australian writer Tim Anderson, entitled title *The Dirty War on Syria*. The book was published in Australia, not Damascus.

(*spoke in English*)

> "Although every war makes ample use of lies and deception, the dirty war on Syria has relied on a level of mass disinformation not seen in living memory. The British-Australian journalist Philip Knightley pointed out that war propaganda typically involves 'a depressingly predictable pattern' of demonizing the enemy leader, then demonizing the enemy people through atrocity stories, real or imagined.
>
> "In Syria the big Powers have sought to hide their hand, using proxy armies while demonizing the Syrian Government and army, accusing them of constant atrocities and then pretending to rescue the Syrian people from their own Government. Far fewer Western people opposed the war on Syria than opposed the invasion of Iraq, because they were deceived about its true nature."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

The Government of my country reiterates its firm position that the only solution to the crisis in Syria is a political one within a dialogue among Syrians, under

Syrian leadership and without any external interference or preconditions. My country reiterates that the political path runs parallel to the path of fighting terrorism, which will continue until all active and deployed armed-terrorist groups in Syria are eliminated.

In conclusion, I would like only to recall that the well-known French journalist Richard Labévière recently wrote an opinion piece in which he criticized *Le Monde's* fabricated coverage of events in Syria. He stated that *Le Monde* journalists got their news about Syria from the book *Alice in Wonderland*. He addressed the editorial board of the newspaper by writing to the journalists as his colleagues — journalists who are part of the tradition of *Le Monde* dating to historic times, people such as Hubert Beuve-Méry, André Fontaine and André Laurent. He wrote that they needed to wake up and that something was amiss in their newspaper.

French journalists Georges Malbrunot and Christian Chesnot wrote an important book to which I alluded in one of my previous statements, entitled *Les Chemins de Damas* In their book, those two known French writers uncovered the fact that Laurent Fabius, former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of France, was responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria in August 2013, when Mr. Sellström was on his way to Aleppo to investigate the use of chemical weapons in Khan Al-Assal. The use of chemical weapons in the Damascus area was meant to prevent Mr. Sellström from going to Aleppo to investigate because, at that time, the former Prime Minister knew who had used chemical weapons in Khan Al-Assal in Aleppo. He wanted to prevent Mr. Sellström from reaching Khan Al-Assal by any means. Therefore, they used chemical weapons in Damascus with the involvement of French intelligence services and the former French Prime Minister. There are so many scandals that I could expose to the Security Council. But rather than take up more of the Council's time, I will stop at this point.

The President: The representative of France has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Lamek (France) (*spoke in French*): I will not revisit the grotesque and insulting musings of the Permanent Representative of Syria. I simply wanted to share — not my surprise, because, really, I was not expecting miracles from him — that I would have liked to hear the Permanent Representative of Syria speak about today's topic, namely, the humanitarian situation in Syria, the need for the 48-hour humanitarian pauses and the need to return to the cessation of hostilities. I would have liked to hear him speak about the real issues — the issues that affect Syrians today and that brought us together — not to hear his absurd ranting, on which I think we need not waste time.

The President: The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I had not planned to take the floor again. But the intervention just made by my colleague the representative of France compels me to request the floor once more.

What he describes as absurd and heresy is a perfect description of the policies of successive French Administrations towards my country, including that of Sarkozy near the end of his mandate and the term of François Hollande. Members will note that I will not use terminology such as "the French regime" here in my statement because I am a maven diplomat and I know that those words are not fit for use in the Chamber. That is why I say "the French Government" and "the French Foreign Minister", and not "the French regime" or "the Minister of the French regime".

France has been hostile to my country for decades. We will never forget the colonial era, when France occupied my country following the sinister Sykes-Picot Agreement. However, the fact that the French representative says that I have not touched upon the humanitarian situation is means that he did not listen to a word of my intervention. Any diplomat in this international Organization who listened to what I said today would realize that I spoke about the humanitarian situation in my country and of the obstacles to the resolution of the crisis, both political and humanitarian. That is why I deeply regret that a representative of a permanent member of the Security Council spoke in a way unrelated to the topic at hand, as though he were politically illiterate.

The games and terrorism that happened in my country are over. The masks have come off. Today public opinion in France, the United States and the United Kingdom knows that their Governments' policies towards my country are wrong. I have just cited a work by an Australian author. His country is 14,000 kilometres from mine, but he understands the truth of what is happening in Syria, which is why he wrote a book describing what is taking place there:

terrorist aggression without precedent in the annals of international relations.

How far will we go in destroying Member countries of the Organization, sovereign States? Korea was invaded on the basis of a lie. Viet Nam was invaded on the basis of a lie. Then Iraq was invaded on the basis of a lie. And then Libya. How long will we continue to perjure ourselves, to be witnesses to the destruction of States Members of this international Organization based on lies, absurd ranting and absolute political ignorance?

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.